



*United States Attorney
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**U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES HISTORIC EXTRADITION OF COCAINE
KINGPIN AND 4 CRIMINAL ASSOCIATES FROM CURACAO TO NEW YORK**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent in Charge of the New York Division of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (the "DEA"), announced today the historic extradition of cocaine kingpin JAMES YEZID VALENCIA RUGELES, a/k/a "Matador," and four of his criminal associates from Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles, to New York, for their alleged trafficking of \$88 million worth of cocaine.

VALENCIA RUGELES, along with MARIO ALBERTO VALENCIA, JAMES JESUS VALENCIA MUNEVAR, OSCAR DIAZ MEJIA, and XIOMARA DIAZ MEJIA, arrived at Westchester County Airport Monday afternoon, and were arraigned yesterday in United States Magistrate's Court in Manhattan, where they were ordered held for an appearance this Friday before United States District Judge ROBERT P. PATTERSON.

These extraditions arise from the first-ever joint Curacao-U.S. investigation of a major drug organization in history. Today's successful extraditions represent the culmination of an international law enforcement operation conducted by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, the DEA's Caribbean Division, the Colombian National Police, and law enforcement agencies of the Netherlands Antilles.

The Indictment alleges that JAMES YEZID VALENCIA RUGELES, along with his two sons, MARIO ALBERTO VALENCIA and JAMES JESUS VALENCIA MUNEVAR, ran a massive cocaine-smuggling organization (the "Valencia Organization") which received tons of cocaine in Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles, which they then transported northward to St. Maarten and ultimately to Puerto Rico and the continental United States. According to the Indictment, the Valencia Organization received its cocaine from the northern coasts of Venezuela and Colombia via container ship and high-speed motorboat.

The Indictment further alleges that, in order to successfully import narcotics into Curacao, the Valencia Organization utilized corrupt law enforcement officials to provide security for its shipments. It also relied on threats of violence to induce the payment of drug debts. During the course of the investigation, law enforcement officers seized approximately 4,438 kilograms of cocaine, worth more than \$88 million on New York City streets, from the Valencia Organization, it was charged.

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum term of 10 years' imprisonment.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the DEA, the Korps Politie Curacao, the Recherché Samenwerking Team, the Coast Guard of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, the Curacao District Attorney's Office, the Colombian National Police, the New York State Police and the New York City Police Department for their unprecedented cooperation and coordination in this investigation. Mr. GARCIA also thanked U.S. Customs and Border Protection, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security, for their assistance in airlifting the defendants from Curacao to the Southern District of New York.

Mr. GARCIA stated: "This case represents a turning point in bringing criminals to justice in the United States, and should send an unambiguous and powerful message to Colombian drug traffickers who have been using Curacao and the Netherlands Antilles to conduct their drug business. The United States, the Netherlands Antilles and Colombia are now all working together to make sure that such criminals will be caught, arrested, and extradited to the United States for prosecution."

Mr. GILBRIDE stated: "Individuals who traffic in illegal narcotics endanger the lives and safety of the citizens of New York. These individuals will be relentlessly investigated

and brought to justice, by the men and women of the DEA, and United States Attorney's Offices, where ever they conduct their operations."

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL M. BAROFSKY and KEVIN R. PUVALOWSKI are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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